



U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Eastern District of California*

501 I Street, Suite 10-100
Sacramento, California 95814

916/554-2700
Fax 916/554-2900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 17, 2004

SACRAMENTO MAN SENTENCED IN SCHEME FOR DEFRAUDING AIRLINES
Defendant Sold Fraudulently Purchased Tickets for Profit

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that defendant ERIC JOHN NORTON, 32, of Sacramento, was sentenced by the Honorable William B. Shubb, United States District Court Judge, to thirty-four months in prison in connection with a scheme to fraudulently purchase airline tickets at a reduced rate. The defendant was ordered to make restitution to the airlines for the losses he caused, and as a condition of supervised release will be prohibited from being involved with the direct, or indirect, sale of airline tickets.

This case was investigated by the United States Secret Service, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the United States Capitol Police.

The defendant pled guilty on November 25, 2003, to one count of wire fraud and one count of falsely pretending to be an officer or employee of the United States, and using that false status to obtain property. The defendant admitted in court to operating a scheme in which he obtained hundreds of airline tickets at reduced government fares by fraudulently representing that he worked for various committees of the United States Senate, including the Judiciary Committee, Oversight Committee, and Appropriations Committee. After purchasing the tickets, NORTON used the travel agency he operated from his home to resell the fraudulently acquired tickets for a profit, causing losses to the airlines of between \$240,000 and \$1 million.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Robin R. Taylor, who is prosecuting the case, NORTON contacted various travel agencies and airline personnel falsely representing that he was working for certain committees of the United States Senate, and created forged letterheads for these agencies, complete with bogus seals, of the U.S. Congress and U.S. Senate, which he used to fax letters to travel agencies and airlines. In these letters he would falsely represent, for example, that he was the Assistant Director or West Coast manager of the Senate Judiciary Committee. By posing as a government employee, he was able to fraudulently purchase tickets from airlines, including, US Air, United, Continental, Northwest, and Southwest airlines, at reduced government fares. NORTON, through his travel agency operated out of his home in Sacramento, resold the tickets at a profit causing significant losses to the airlines.

During the investigation of this case, the defendant fled to Bogota, Columbia. In May 2003, he was arrested by Columbian officials, and deported to the United States to face the

instant fraud charges.

A copy of this press release is available at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae/home>, select Press Releases.

###